



The Lincoln Kinsman

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CHARLES FRIEND'S NOTES

HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH WILLIAM HERNDON AND LINCOLN'S
RELATIVES

The chief sources of information originating with the Hanks relatives of Abraham Lincoln came from John Hanks, Charles Hanks, Dennis Friend Hanks and Charles Friend. The reminiscence of the first three informants has been discussed in previous issues of the *Kinsman* and now we have before us the testimony of Charles Friend. The first three mentioned witnesses were contemporaries of Abraham Lincoln and part of what they remembered was from personal observation. Two of these three men, John and Dennis, were interviewed by William Herndon and through him much of what they reported was made known to the public.

Little attention has been paid to the collection of folklore and tradition about the Hanks family and Abraham Lincoln's paternity gathered by Charles Friend, although what he had to say about the parentage of the President was given serious consideration by Robert Todd

Lincoln, and the secretaries of the President, Nicolay and Hay.

Although Charles Friend was about forty years younger than Dennis and John, and represents the generation associated with the children of the President, Herndon also interviewed Charles and had considerable correspondence with him over a period of twenty years or more. Charles Friend lived long enough so that the editor of the *Lincoln Kinsman* also had the opportunity of interviewing him. The Lincoln National Life Foundation has copies of several letters which passed between him and both Herndon and Nicolay.

Charles Friend was twenty years of age when Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated President of the United States but he was not born until thirty-two years after the birth of Abraham Lincoln. He may be considered nothing more than a gatherer of family and community reminiscences. Certainly he had no firsthand evidence

on anything he wrote about the Kentucky Lincolns whom apparently he had never seen.

Although Friend had no personal contacts with Abraham Lincoln, he did live most of his life in the county where the President was born. Here he recorded the gossip of the community much of which was not fit to print and most all of it he made available to William Herndon.

Early Correspondence with Herndon

It is apparent from the first letter which William Herndon wrote to Charles Friend on February 6, 1866, that the correspondence between the two men was begun by Herndon. He introduced himself as the law partner of Lincoln for twenty years and asked Friend, "Will you correspond with me a few times in relation to Mr. Lincoln and his family?" and he then put these questions to him:

"Where did the Lincolns come from and how did they write their names 80 years ago.

"Did the Lincolns ever live in Pennsylvania? Did they come from England to Virginia or Pennsylvania. Were they Quakers or british.

"What County did Abram Lincoln's grand father settle in in Ky. Bullit or what County. About what year did he die.

"When Was Ab'm. Lincoln, Pres'd't, born—how far from Hodgenville,—what direction from Tenn. Did Thomas Lincoln live on one or two farms after the birth of A. Lincoln. What made Thomas Lincoln leave Ky.—was it slavery—was it poverty—was it for some offence.

"What County in Va. did the Hanks and Lincolns come from and what

year and where did they first settle?"

Friend immediately replied to this letter but apparently failed to answer the many questions propounded. He did however, put some questions to Herndon and we are fortunate in having a copy of the Herndon reply in which Friend's questions are answered. The letter follows in full.

"Springfield, Ill. Feb. 15, 1866.

"Mr. Friend.

"My Dear Sir:

"Your kind letter dated the 12th of this month handed to me and for which I am much obliged. I thank you for your promptness. You ask me some questions. Who was Dennis Hanks' mother? She was the sister of Thomas Lincoln's first wife and Mother of A. Lincoln, President. Her maiden name was Nancy Hanks. Called Nancy Sparrow. A. Lincoln and Dennis Hanks as I understand it are cousins.

"The father of Mrs. Lincoln, Abms. mother—was named Henry Sparrow and his wife's name was Lucy Sparrow. This information will give you the clew to all I want it is hoped. If it does not please write to me and I will write to Hanks and see if he knows more.

"Your friend,

"W. H. Herndon."

This reply of William Herndon to Charles Friend is of very great importance in consideration of what followed. As late as the date of the letter just quoted, February 15, 1866, Herndon was under the impression that the mother of Dennis Hanks and the mother of Abraham Lincoln were sisters and he so wrote Charles Friend. Herndon knew that Lincoln's mother was named Nancy Hanks and it was known that Dennis Hanks' mother

was also a Nancy Hanks which made Charles Friend conclude that instead of there being two sisters, each named Nancy, that the mother of the President and the mother of Dennis were one and the same person. We will observe that while Herndon changed his mind, Dennis stuck to it.

While it is evident Herndon was confused about the cousinship relation between Dennis and the President, there is no excuse for the statement he made when he concluded, "The father of Mrs. Lincoln, Abms. mother, was Henry Sparrow." Later on Herndon claimed that as early as 1850 Abraham Lincoln told him during the famous buggy ride episode that his own mother was an illegitimate and that the father of her child was unknown. If William Herndon fifteen years before had learned from Lincoln's own lips that his mother was illegitimate why should he speak so positively about the Henry Sparrow parentage?

In the letters which Herndon wrote to Friend during the next year or so the subject of Lincoln's mother is never again mentioned with the assumption that Herndon was willing to leave the question as stated in his letter of February 15.

Although Herndon must have known that Charles Friend was not born until thirty-two years after the President's birth and twenty-five years after the Lincolns left the country, the correspondence that passed between Herndon and Friend largely had to do with the early part of Lincoln's life about which Friend could not have had any firsthand evidence. Herndon persists in putting questions to him in subsequent letters written February 28, March 28 and November

30, 1866 respectively, relative to Lincoln's boyhood days.

It was largely on such hearsay evidence as Charles Friend could gather from the Kentucky neighbors that Herndon wrote his supposedly authentic stories about Lincoln's childhood days.

Early Correspondence with Dennis Hanks

Just how early the correspondence between Dennis Hanks and Charles Friend began we cannot say, but by the month of March, 1866 they were writing to each other. The contents of the letter written by Dennis on March 25, 1866 reveals that Dennis had been in correspondence with other members of the Friend family. The letter follows in part:

"March 25, 1866.

"Dear Charles:

"I have written a letter to your Uncle Robert which I enclosed two of my pictures. This was in February. I have got no answer from him about them. He told me write and mail my letter to Buffalo, Larue Co. and he would get it. So I have no answer about it I may be mistaken about the place. Where is Buffalo, Charles, for I know all them places in that Country. Charles is Jeny Hanks your grandmother's sister alive and is John and Conrad Hanks alive yet? Is Philip Creal's widow living yet or his first little boy? Is the old Lunderner poplar a standing yet? I was born in 30 steps of that tree in the old peach orchard. . . .

"No whither your Uncle Robert got my picture or not.

"Your relative & well wisher,

"Dennis F. Hanks.

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"My mother was a Hanks. She says that your grand father was my father. This don't doubt."

The chief value of this letter is in the family relationship it reviews and also in the statement about the place where Dennis was born and raised, but contributes nothing to our knowledge of Lincoln.

Correspondence with John Nicolay

Possibly the most important correspondence which Charles Friend received from various biographers was the letter from Lincoln's secretary, John Nicolay. Apparently Dennis Hanks had sent one of the letters he had received from Charles Friend to Robert Lincoln, son of the President, and in turn Robert passed it on to Nicolay. Because of the importance of this letter it is printed in full.

"Chicago, Ill. July 26, 1873.

"Chas. Friend, Esq.,

"Hodgenville, Ky.

"My Dear Sir:

"I take the liberty of introducing myself to you, as having formerly been the private Secretary of Pres. Lincoln, deceased, from the time of his nomination until his death; and as the friend of the family I wish to make some inquiries through your

kindness concerning the early history of Pres. Lincoln's parents.

"Mr. Robert T. Lincoln, son of the late President, whom I am visiting here for a day or two, has shown me a letter of yours under date of 26th June last, written to your Uncle, Mr. Dennis F. Hanks, which the latter forwarded to Mr. Robert T. Lincoln. In the letter you mentioned that Pres. Lincoln's father and mother were married by a Mr. Alexander McDougal and that a daughter of this preacher (Mrs. Elizabeth Middleton by name) is still living, who was present at the wedding.

"Now I wish to inquire of you the address of Mrs. Middleton, and where she lives; her age now; and when the wedding occurred; and in short, all the details of the event, as fully as she may be able to recollect them.

"Would it be possible for you to visit Mrs. Middleton and write down from her own words a full and complete statement of the whole affair, and ask her to sign and authenticate it in some formal manner?

"And if you could do this for me, would you also please make as full inquiries as possible through her whether any record was ever made of this marriage, or whether the original license or some paper concerning it might not still be found among her father's papers or some record in some family bible in the neighborhood.

"If you will please take the trouble and time to do this for me, you will not only oblige myself and Pres. Lincoln's family and friends here, but I would cheerfully reimburse you for any travelling or other expenses it might cause you.

"Please address your reply to me

here, care of Mr. Robert T. Lincoln, as I shall remain in the West some two months, although my regular address is at Washington City according to the card I enclose.

"Your ob't. serv't.,

"Jno. G. Nicolay."

This Nancy Hanks mentioned by Charles Friend however, was not the mother of Lincoln, but the mother of Dennis Hanks who did later on marry Levi Hall in the community where Abraham Lincoln was born. This wedding added confusion to the already muddled story of the Nancy Hankses, and it is not known whether or not Mr. Nicolay was able to straighten out the confusion.

Later Correspondence with Herndon

Herndon's first correspondence with Charles Friend had taken place in 1866 and now twenty-three years later letters again passed between them. Friend wrote to Herndon on July 17, 1889, but the contents of the letter are not known, although it is apparent from Herndon's reply on August 2 that it had something to do with the post-office appointment at Sonora, Kentucky.

In the meantime Friend had written another letter to Herndon dated July 31 and brought up again the stories of Lincoln's illegitimacy then in circulation in Kentucky. He had secured from Abraham Enlow the denial of the story that he was the father of Abraham Lincoln. The rest of the letter is so loathsome that its contents are unprintable in the *Kinsman*.

Herndon replied to Friend's letter of July 31 on August 10 and ten days later Friend wrote Herndon another letter of the same general character

as the first in which he tried to confirm his theory that Nancy Hanks, mother of Dennis Friend Hanks, was also the mother of Abraham Lincoln, and implied that Dennis may have been a full brother of Abraham Lincoln.

The chief value of this later correspondence with Herndon is to reveal what the citizens of the community where Lincoln was born were thinking with respect to his paternity as late as 1889.

On January 23, 1890, Herndon wrote to Jesse Weik and made this reference to Charles Friend, "There are some papers from Charles Friend of Kentucky about Nancy Hanks, Thomas Lincoln. From this man's testimony it appears that there was but one Nancy Hanks and if that is so, then Thomas Lincoln married Dennis Hanks' mother. Read what Charles Friend says. Probably no attention need be paid to it though file away the papers as evidence."

Later Correspondence with Dennis Hanks

The renewal of correspondence with Herndon also opened the way for further correspondence to pass between Friend and Dennis Hanks. On August 1, 1889 Friend wrote to Dennis who was then 90 years old, and received a reply dated August 10, but apparently written by someone else for Dennis. Excerpts from this letter follows.

"Charleston, Ill. Aug. 12, '89.

"Charles Friend,

"Sonora, Hardin Co., Ky.

"My Dear Nephew:

"Your welcome and unexpected letter of August the first reached me

in due season. . . . I was surprised to learn that you met the Hon. W. H. Herndon and from him learned where I was. I thought you already knew. I was surprised to learn that my brothers and sisters were living. . . . Your grandmother has made a mistake. I never lived with them. I lived with my Uncle and Aunt Betsy Sparrow and was raised by them. Now Charles I can state to you how your Grand Mother made the mistake. We lived on the South fork of the Nolin and you lived on a little branch called Sink King Run, 'near the South Fork of Nolin'. . . .

"Yes, Uncle Jessie and Aunt Polly moved to this State and settled near Paris, Edgar Co., which joins this Co. (Coles) on the East, his body is buried there. Aunt Polly is dead. Lucy Friend married a man named Hatfield and they moved with them to Paris, they then returned to Ky. . . . I have men and women from all parts of the country to see. Newspaper correspondents have written me up time and again. My picture been taken and inserted in all the leading papers. My connection with the great emancipator has given me a lasting fame, 'so that after life's fitful fever is over' children, generations to come will read, think and ponder over the name of him who writes you now. My children 13—out that number I raised 8 and 6 are living, the oldest Jane Dowling is going on 68 and the youngest Theopelus Hanks is 41. John F. Hanks and his wife have 10 children, 2 grand children, they live in Oregon. Below is my signature.

"P. S.

"Who owns the place at the farm that Uncle Abraham Lincoln was born and all about the place, how the

land is used and if it has been farmed and who by.

"D. F. Hanks."

Correspondence with Mrs. Hitchcock

When Mrs. Caroline Hanks Hitchcock was gathering material on the Hanks family she got in touch with Charles Friend in 1895. He wrote two letters to her, one on November 26, and the other on December 6, both written from Madisonville, Kentucky. An excerpt from the November 26 letter is noted.

"The Dennis Hanks you wrote me about is my Uncle a Son of Charles Friend my Grand-Father. His mother was Nancy Hanks the mother of A. Lincoln President of this U. S. A. There was 4 of the Hanks girls that came to Kentucky from Virginia and settled in Hardin Co, My Grand Uncle Jessie Friend married Mary Hanks or as She was known by my Father as Aunt Polly Friend. Nancy Hanks after Uncle Dennis was a few years old Married Thomas Lincoln. A. Lincoln' Father and A Lincoln was born of this marriage 2½ miles South of Hodgenville LaRue Co then Hardin Co. LaRue was formed in 1844 by Cutting a portion of Hardin and one or two other Counties, one of the other girls married Levy Hall a club footed tailor and the other married Thomas Sparrow Thomas Lincoln procured his marriage license in Springfield Ky. Abe Lincoln lived on Knob Creek until the families all removed from Ky to Indiana until Dennis went with Aunt Polly Friend and they reared him. He lived a great part of his life in Coles Co Ill but died 3 years ago at Paris Ill."

The letter written in December con-

firmed much that was written in the previous correspondence but does rather imply that Friend was coming to the conclusion that Thomas Lincoln was the father of the President. Although he held tenaciously that there was but one Nancy Hanks, he admitted that Thomas had secured a license to marry Nancy Hanks in a different court from the one in which the Nancy of Hardin County was then living.

The Hanks' Relatives of Friend

The editor of the *Lincoln Kinsman* interviewed Charles Friend in Hardin County, Kentucky on November 26, 1921 and secured his duly authorized affidavit with respect to his family and several traditions relating to the Lincolns. The following excerpt concerning his family history is copied from an affidavit signed by Friend.

The affiant Mr. Charles Friend after being duly sworn upon his oath states; "My name is Charles Friend, I was born in Elizabethtown, Hardin County, Ky. on Jan. 20, 1841 and have lived in Larue practically all of my life. My father's name was Feilding Friend and he was the son of Charles Friend, my grandfather, for whom I was named. Grandfather Charles Friend married Sarah Huss, Nov. 19, 1804 and nine children were born to this union as follows; Harriet, born March 15, 1805; Fielding, born July 12, 1806; Kitty, born Dec. 21, 1809; John, born March 10, 1811; Lydia; Robert, born May, 1818; Richard, born 1808; Matilda, born 1814, Elza, born 1837. My grandfather also had three brothers Isaac, Jesse and Andrew. Jesse Friend married Mary (Polly) Hanks, a sister of Nancy

Hanks who married Thomas Lincoln.

The affiant further states; "In correspondence with Dennis Friend Hanks some years before he died, he told me that my grandfather Charles Friend, was his father, and that his mother was a Hanks, 'this do not doubt.' He also said that he was reared by his Aunt Elizabeth Sparrow and Thomas Sparrow. Elizabeth Sparrow being an own sister of Nancy Hanks. It has been said that my grandfather married a Nancy Sparrow, but I have never heard any one in the family even suggest it. Neither have I heard the name of Lucy Hanks, mentioned, by the old people, whom some say was the sister of Elizabeth, Polly or Mary, and Nancy Hanks, and the mother of another Nancy Hanks who married Thomas Lincoln."

Affiant further states; "Judge Jonathan Friend Cesna once spoke of a Levi Hall, whom he called 'the club-footed tailor,' as having married one of the Hanks women, but he never knew which one."

Affiant further states; "One day in Hodgenville Abraham Enlow, who had been advertised as the father of President Lincoln, was in my brother-in-law's store, in which I was a clerk. My brother-in-law A. H. Redman in the presence of Dr. William H. Holt and myself, asked Uncle Abe Enlow this question by permission of Mr. Enlow; 'Are you the father of Abe Lincoln President of the United States?' he answered; 'I am not, I was only 15 years old when Abe was born and Nancy Hanks his mother was a grown woman. I believe A. Lincoln to be the son of Thomas Lincoln the husband of Nancy Hanks, but should he be illegitimate, he might

have been the son of Charles Friend by whom she bore her first child Dennis Friend Hanks. I am satisfied that he was not the son of said Friend, for the reason that the Friends were of Penn. Dutch descent, set low of stature, and Abe was tall the very opposite.”

Chas Friend (sig)

“State of Ky

“County of Hardin

“Subscribed and sworn before me this 26 day of Nov 1921 by Chas Friend.

“David B. Lewis

“Notary Public

“H. C.”

Grandfather Charles Friend before his marriage to Sarah Huss was responsible for the paternity of Dennis Friend Hanks whose mother was a Nancy Hanks. This relation was a well-known fact in the community as the middle name of Dennis implies. Previous to the birth of Dennis, Jesse Friend, a brother of Charles Friend, Sr. had married Mary or Polly Hanks, a sister of the Nancy Hanks who became the mother of Dennis, so that there was intermarriage between the Friends and Hankses as early as (1796) and it is likely that Dennis was born in the home of Jesse and Mary Hanks Friend.

Not only was the old grandfather, Charles Friend responsible for the

paternity of Dennis Friend Hanks, but he was apparently the father of another illegitimate child born to Nancy Riley on November 7, 1802. Miss Riley made oath to this fact on February 8, 1803 before Isom Enlow a justice of the peace in Hardin County on February 8, 1803 as is evident from the county records (Judgments and other papers, Jan. 1809 to Jan. 1811).

This very frank statement about the character of the grandfather, Charles Friend, is presented because the inference is often drawn and usually stressed by William Herndon that the Hanks family should bear the burden of the blame for moral delinquency. It appears in this case at least that the seducer of Dennis Hanks' mother was by reputation the most to be censured.

Undoubtedly the correspondence of Charles Friend with William Herndon in 1866 contributed greatly to the theory of Lincoln's illegitimacy which Herndon accepted. It is doubtful if Charles Friend in all of his correspondence was able to contribute one single fact with reference to Lincoln's parentage, nativity, or childhood, although Herndon wrote to him on August 2, 1889, “It is very true that you gave me much and great information in gathering up the facts of Mr. Lincoln's life in LaRue County, Kentucky.”